MEDICAL SCHOOL ADMISSION INTERVIEWS

Medical schools conduct interviews to evaluate a candidate’s academic preparation, related experience, personal qualities, communication skills, career goals and fit with their educational program. The interview visit varies with each medical school, but may include interviews with faculty, community physicians, meetings with student affairs staff, and tours of the medical school facilities with current medical school students. Many schools include a breakfast or lunch with all the candidates and staff together. There may be a welcome and overview by the Dean or the Admissions staff at the start of the day and a closing session for general questions at the end of the day. Most schools send you the interview schedule when your date is confirmed, so you may make your travel arrangements.

Interviewers develop an impression of how you look, dress, speak, and act in order to provide their feedback to the admissions committee. You may increase your chances for interview success through preparation, reflection and evaluation. When preparing, keep in mind the skills and qualifications that medical schools are seeking in candidates. Practice talking about your skills, accomplishments and career goals. You need to inspire confidence in your potential to be a successful medical student and to become a compassionate and skilled physician.

An important difference in the interview process is the practice of interviewing candidates with either Open or Closed application files. Your interviewer may have read your complete application and know of your qualifications and background OR may know nothing about you! For either format, it is critical to evaluate ahead of time what is most important for the interviewers to know about your background and preparation for medical school, your experiences and your career goals.

The two types of interview formats currently used by medical schools are traditional and MMI formats. Traditional interviews are conducted with one interviewer for 30 to 45 minutes. You may have one or two interviews, depending on the school. The questions are often a mix of traditional and behavioral in nature (see questions on pages 6 and 7) and the interactions more conversational. Traditional interviews may be open or closed file.

Multiple Mini Interviews (MMI) formats are closed file and involve a series of 9 or 10 stations, where the student has 7 minutes to respond to a traditional question, discuss a topic or ethical situation, or respond to a scenario. Each station has an evaluator who observes and rates your response and interaction. This format allows students to be evaluated by 9 or 10 different interviewers. The MMI evaluates your critical thinking, communication, and ethical decision making skills.
BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: PREPARE AND PRACTICE

Schedule plenty of time to practice before interviews. Evaluate and know yourself.

- Prepare to describe yourself and to state your value as a candidate. Why do you want to become a physician? What are your abilities? How have you prepared?
- Practice describing your accomplishments, experience, education, skills, career goals...
- Review your written application – know it well and incorporate it into your verbal answers.
- Answering typical practice questions will help you to be ready for other questions.
- For each skill you have, prepare detailed examples of where you demonstrated that skill.
- Practice answering interview questions out loud with someone else and in front of a mirror.
- Use a web cam to answer some of the practice interview questions on UA Interview Prep: http://www.career.arizona.edu/student/jobs-and-interviewing/ua-interview-prep
- Career Services provides individual mock interviews and career counseling by appointment.

Research medical schools and current issues in medicine and health care.

- Practice discussing current ethical, social, and legislative issues in health care and medicine
- Conduct your research to develop questions you will ask about the school during interviews.
- Research every medical school you are applying to: curriculum, faculty, history, resources, size, campus facilities, location, rankings, student services, specializations, community programs, student organizations, local hospital connections, and the community around the school...
- Be prepared to speak about your specific reasons for why you want to attend a particular school.
- Talk to physicians (clinical/non-clinical practice), faculty, medical students, and admissions staff.
- Review the AMA Code of Medical Ethics.
- Review the medical school’s student Code of Conduct and Academic Integrity policies.

DURING THE INTERVIEW: PRESENTATION AND PERFORMANCE

Whether the school you are interviewing with interviews candidates with Open or Closed application files, the interviewer(s) must easily recognize your qualification and preparation for medical school, in addition to your knowledge of and interest in their medical school. You must articulate your preparation to attend medical school, ability to be successful, along with your career potential and motivation. Be honest, sincere, confident, and positive.

Arrive early, check in and wait for your interviewer.

- Your body language, facial expressions, poise, mannerisms, clothes, grooming, and overall presentation and appearance are being evaluated during an interview.
- Be professionally dressed in a suit with shined shoes. Appearance matters.
- Turn cell phones off throughout interview (don’t text in the lobby or waiting area).
- When called, stand up, smile, offer a handshake and greet your interviewer by their formal name. (“Good morning Dr. Rose. I am Zoe Wildcat and it is a pleasure to meet you.”)
- Be poised, listen attentively and be aware of your body language: maintain eye contact, nod your head appropriately, sit up straight, unfold your arms, lean forward. Be expressive.
- Avoid distracting hand movements, squirming in chair, and touching your face or hair.
Listen attentively. Be concise, to the point, and answer the question that is being asked.

- Provide detailed answers and specific examples - avoid yes and no responses.
- Demonstrate knowledge of yourself and your interest in their particular school.
- Give specific examples of past situations where you demonstrated the skills and desired behavioral competencies required for medical school and a career in medicine.
- Be confident, honest, friendly, cooperative, enthusiastic, positive and professional.
- Speak clearly and concisely. Use proper grammar and professional language.
- Avoid saying filler phrases: um, uh, like, you know, in other words, to be honest with you, to tell you the truth, long story short, as I said before, you know what I mean...

Ask quality questions (prepare at least 10 questions in advance that you might ask).

- Decide what you want to know and what you will ask before you go to your interview.
- Possible topics to ask your interviewers about include: curriculum, faculty, staff, rotations, student support services, research, community programs, evaluations, facilities, funding and research grants, resources available for students, and the interviewer’s background.

Thank the interviewer(s) and leave promptly (do not linger or try to prolong the interview).

- Express your appreciation for the interview, stand up and say thank you as you shake hands.

TABLE MANNERS DURING INTERVIEW MEALS

A formal breakfast, lunch or dinner may be part of your interview. Your hosts are evaluating your social graces, dining etiquette and communication skills. Participate in the conversation by asking pertinent questions and contributing to the discussion. Stay with safe conversational topics and be cautious about discussing politics, religion, health or personal issues.

Remember your best table manners:

- order food that is easy to eat with a knife and fork so you do not eat with your hands
- place and keep your napkin in your lap throughout the whole meal
- wait until everyone is served before eating; always taste your food before using salt or pepper
- your glasses are to your right and your bread plate is to your left
- pass to your right; salt and pepper always travel together - even if only one is requested
- only cut your food one bite at a time (never cut up all your food at once)
- keep your elbows off the table and never talk while you are chewing
- to signal servers that you have finished your meal, place your silverware at the 4 o’clock position on your plate; when you leave the table, place your napkin to the left of your plate

AFTER THE INTERVIEW: REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Keep written notes of all of your interviews. Who interviewed you, when, what was discussed...

Evaluate your performance to determine your interviewing strengths and weaknesses.

- How did the interview go? Did you highlight your education, experience, and skills?
- Did you ask good questions to show interest in medicine and knowledge of the school?
- Did you support your skills and accomplishments with specific examples?
- Closed interview well with a short summary of skills? Stated interest in school and said thank you?
- After interview, made detailed notes of questions you were asked and everything discussed?
- What worked well for you? What could you improve on during your next interview?
WHAT WILL INTERVIEWERS ASK YOU?

Interviewers ask questions to assess your educational preparation, relevant skills, work experience, campus involvement and personal characteristics. No two interviews will be the same, although preparing for common interview questions may help you to learn to focus your answers on the information most important for you to convey. Practice describing in detail the situations where you demonstrated the competencies required for admissions. You must inspire confidence in your ability and motivation to become a compassionate and skilled physician. Interview questions cover many topics, but you must be prepared to talk about:

✓ why you want to go to medical school
✓ your educational preparation and career intent
✓ what you have done to prepare to be a successful medical student
✓ qualities you have to become an excellent physician
✓ what or who influenced your decision to pursue medicine
✓ motivations to pursue a medical career
✓ why you applied to and what you know about this medical school
✓ current issues in health care, medicine, medical education

Skills and topics interviewers question students about:

- commitment to be of service to society
- compassion, empathy, altruism
- interpersonal skills: able to get along with and work well with others
- communication skills: verbal, written, listening
- the extent and scope of your health care setting experiences and patient interactions (clinical, non-clinical, research, community service, hospital, public health, education, teaching, shadowing, local, national, international, campus involvement, etc.)
- knowledge and ability to speak about medicine, health care, ethical issues, current trends
- knowledge and interest in their particular school (related to medical curriculum, faculty, specialties, research and clinical opportunities, resources for students, facilities, etc...)
- logic, critical thinking and analytical reasoning
- conversational ability to articulate ideas and support your statements
- professionalism, character, attitude, integrity, maturity, honesty
- flexibility, adaptability, resilience, initiative, perseverance
- adherence to ethical principles, ethical decision-making and behavior
- time, stress, change and project management
- achievement orientation
- accepting feedback; learning from disappointments and failures as well as your successes
- cultural competence; sensitivity to studying with, working with and serving diverse populations
- excellent academic record and strong foundation in science in organic & general chemistry, biological & physical sciences, physics, math, anatomy & physiology, etc...
- overall commitment to and preparation for medical school and a medical career
ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Identifying your skills will help you prepare for the questions medical school admissions interviewers ask. Describe your experiences, skills, knowledge and qualifications as they relate to medical school. Analyze the qualifications and prepare to talk about how and where you have demonstrated the required skills, strengths, competencies and characteristics through your education and experiences. Focus on measurable skills and specific examples where you can cite evidence of your skills and knowledge. Use the STAR approach to talk about your history and your strongest skills.

STAR: skills focused approach to answering interview questions

- Recall 10 successful experiences where you liked what you did and you did it well.
- Identify 10 challenging experiences where things did not go as planned or you were not pleased with your performance or the outcome.
- Use various situations to describe your experiences from college, jobs, internships, hospitals, clinics, community service, campus activities, student involvement, class projects, teamwork, research, labs, volunteer roles, leadership roles, committees, etc...
- Evaluate skills you used and how you were effective during each experience.
- A strong story demonstrates use of multiple skills in one situation.
- Practice telling detailed stories about your experiences, describing:
  - Situation: challenges, problems, concerns, issues, conflicts
  - Tasks: your responsibilities and role in the situation
  - Actions: your behaviors, focusing on skills and competencies you used
  - Results: outcomes, accomplishments, what you contributed, how you were effective

Behaviors and skills being evaluated include:

- scientific knowledge
- ethical decision-making
- verbal communication
- compassionate care
- showing empathy
- accepting feedback
- learning from successes
- patient interactions
- community service
- academic skills
- analytical reasoning
- written communication
- learning new things quickly
- handling pressure
- flexibility and adaptability
- interpersonal skills
- decision making
- achievement orientation
- problem solving
- leadership
- altruism
- working under stress
- time management
- showing initiative
- taking direction
- teambuilding

Create a list of each of your top 10 skills with at least two situations where you demonstrated each skill, using the STAR method to describe what you did and how you were effective in 20 varied situations.

Skill: ____________________

**Situation #1:** ____________________________________________

Tasks: ___________________________________________________________________

Actions: __________________________________________________________________

Results: __________________________________________________________________

**Situation #2:** ____________________________________________

Tasks: ___________________________________________________________________

Actions: __________________________________________________________________

Results: __________________________________________________________________

The University of Arizona, Career Services, August 2014
INTERVIEW PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Keep in mind the skills and qualifications that medical schools are seeking in candidates. You communicated your skills, qualifications and motivations in your application to get invited to an interview. Now you must present your case verbally and communicate why you believe you are a qualified candidate for medical school and the profession of medicine. Before every interview, practice talking about your motivation, influences, skills, accomplishments, and career goals.

- Why do you want to be a physician?
- Tell me about yourself and how you have prepared for medical school.
- When did you first decide on medicine as a profession? What or who influenced you?
- Describe your related experiences. (volunteer, community service, clinical, research, etc.)
- What qualities do you have to be a good physician?
- How has your education and experience prepared you for medical school?
- What problems and challenges do you anticipate during medical school?
- What challenges do you think you will face during your medical career?
- What changes would you like to see made in the current health care delivery system?
- What factors have influenced your decision to attend medical school?
- What type of medicine do you want to practice?
- How did you choose your undergraduate school and your major?
- Explain the discrepancy between your grades and your MCAT scores.
- Describe your greatest strengths and skills. Give me detailed examples of each one.
- How far do you believe a doctor’s responsibility extends to his or her patients?
- Describe what you are doing to improve two of your weaknesses. Be specific.
- Are you applying to other professional schools or graduate schools?
- What will you do if you do not get into medical school?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate potential medical schools?
- Why do you want to go to this school? What do you know about this medical school?
- What other medical schools have you applied to? What is your first choice and why?
- Why did you take the MCAT twice? How did you prepare differently the second time?
- How did the doctors you volunteered with influence your outlook on medicine?
- If you observed a fellow student cheating, what would you do? Why does it matter?
- What regrets do you have about your college education and experience up until now?
- What do you consider to be some of the most pressing issues in health care today?
- What changes do you think are needed in the structure of medical education in the U.S.?
- What resources do you read and use to keep current on the trends in medicine?
- What is your opinion on __________? (various topics and issues in health care)
- Do you have any questions you would like to ask me? (always have questions to ask)
- Is there anything else you want to tell me and the admissions committee?
- Why should we admit you? What makes you a strong candidate for medical school?
BEHAVIORAL-BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Behavioral-based interviews involve questions asking you for examples of past situations demonstrating you have the skills, competencies and work behaviors a medical school wants to find in candidates. Interviewers ask for examples of past situations with positive or negative results and want you to describe the situation, your actions, any challenges or problems you faced, and the outcome. This popular interview questioning style focuses on evaluating past behaviors to predict future behaviors and your potential for success. Identify specific situations where you demonstrated the required competencies, skills and qualifications required for admissions. Give examples of your past situations using the STAR Approach by describing the:

- Situation: challenges, problems, concerns, issues, conflicts
- Tasks: your responsibilities and role in the situation
- Actions: focusing on your behavior and the skills you used
- Results: outcomes, accomplishments, what you contributed, how you were effective

- Describe an accomplishment. What did you do to make that happen? Be specific.
- Tell me about a time you performed well in a stressful situation. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you were not (or you were) satisfied with your performance.
- Tell me about a time you believe you made a difference with a patient. What type of challenges did you face? What did you do? What did you contribute to the situation?
- Describe a problem you had in a health care setting. How did you go about solving it?
- Describe a time when you worked on a team. What was your role and contribution?
- Describe how you dealt with the grief you experienced as a hospice volunteer.
- Describe your biggest challenge in preparing for medical school. How did you overcome it?
- Describe a time when you volunteered or worked as a member of an interdisciplinary health care team. Describe your role. What did you contribute? What challenges did you face?
- Tell me about a situation when you were part of a team and a team member was not performing their role as expected. What did you do? What were the results?
- Describe a time you successfully managed multiple tasks. How did you prioritize?
- Describe a recent problem you attempted to solve using a systematic and logical process.
- Tell me how you handled a conflict with a co-worker. What did you learn from that?
- Tell me about a weakness you used to have. What did you do to improve that skill?
- Describe a time when you did not perform well in a stressful or challenging situation.
- Tell me about a time when you made suggestions for improving a process or procedure.
- Tell me what you did in your most recent volunteer experience to be effective. What challenges did you have to overcome? What did you contribute? What did you learn?
- Tell me about a time when you took the initiative and went beyond what was expected of you in order to complete a work project or class assignment.
- Tell me about a time when you utilized good listening skills and empathy.
- Describe a time when you effectively interacted with people from diverse backgrounds in a health care environment. What were the challenges and how did you handle them?
- Give me an example of a time you had to make an ethical decision.
PROFESSIONAL APPEARANCE COUNTS! DRESS UP!

It is always better to be conservative and overdressed than underdressed in interviews. When in doubt, you will always be safe in a professional suit! Classic cut matching suits and shined shoes are recommended for men and women, to make a positive first impression.

✓ Dress conservatively in dark colors such as navy blue and dark gray.
✓ Choose natural suit fabrics that don’t wrinkle – preferably wool gabardine.
✓ Wear minimal jewelry. Have neat hair and clean fingernails.
✓ Prepare in advance – avoid last minute shopping in case you need time for alterations.
✓ Try on your suit before the interview to be sure it fits and makes you look professional.
✓ Be well groomed, use deodorant but not cologne or perfume.
✓ Avoid eating garlic and onions before interviews. Carry breath mints.
✓ You may carry a dark portfolio with paper for notes and a nice pen.
✓ If interviewing in the winter on the east coast, you may need an overcoat.
✓ If you are traveling to interviews, pack light. Carry your suit in a small carry-on suitcase or garment bag – do not check your bags and risk losing your luggage when flying to interviews.

WOMEN
• Wear a navy blue or dark gray matching suit in a color and fit that complements your body type.
• Professionally tailored skirted suits or pantsuits are accepted.
• Skirts should be about knee length (not too short – no thigh showing when you’re sitting).
• Wear a long sleeved, ironed blouse in white or beige.
• Sleeveless and low necklines are not professional - no armpits or cleavage please!
• Wear low heeled, closed-toe and closed-heel black pumps and hose with skirted suits.
• Wear flat or low-heeled, closed-toe black polished shoes with slacks.
• Do not wear open toe or open heel shoes, sandals, spiked heels, or bare legs with a suit.
• With skirts, wear hose neutral in color or matching the color of your suit, free of runs or snags.
• Only use light make-up. Make sure fingernails are clean - avoid flashy nail polish colors.
• Have well groomed hair pulled away from your face so you won’t touch it when you talk.

MEN
• Wear dark matching suits in navy blue or dark gray solid color or thin pinstripes.
• Single-breasted jackets are more common than double-breasted.
• Find a great fit that complements your body type.
• Long-sleeved, ironed white cotton shirts, with cuff extending ¼” below the jacket sleeve.
• Wear a plain white t-shirt under your button down dress shirt - especially if you tend to sweat.
• Conservative silk ties should complement suit and be as wide as your lapels (2¾” to 3½”).
• The bottom tip of your tie should land in the middle of your belt when you are standing.
• Black shined shoes with a matching belt.
• Dark socks long enough that your skin does not show when sitting with your legs crossed.
• Well-groomed hair. Make sure your nails are clean and manicured.
• Be clean shaven or have your beard and mustache neatly trimmed.